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**Atlantic Salmon Spring Runs Double in 2011**  
***Penobscot River passes 3,000; 8<sup>th</sup> highest since program inception***

Atlantic salmon counts from the Veazie trap on the Penobscot River now number 3,097, according to statistics provided by the Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR). The counts are more than double last year's totals, and represent the eighth highest run since the counting program began in 1978 and the highest since 1986.

Each year, DMR conducts routine monitoring of the abundance and status of adult Atlantic salmon in many Maine rivers. The trap at the Veazie Dam fishway allows biologists to count the number of sea-run Atlantic salmon returning to the Penobscot River. The numbers do not include captures of aquaculture stray fish or captive reared adult salmon released from federal hatcheries.

Since 2000, Atlantic salmon have been listed as federally endangered in eight Maine rivers, including the Penobscot River. Fisheries scientists from DMR, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration have been working closely with the Penobscot Indian National and non-profit partners to recover the Atlantic salmon. Many recovery efforts are being carried out as part of the Atlantic Salmon Recovery Framework, an agreement that guides how state, federal and tribal government agencies work together to prioritize and fund recovery actions. The ultimate goal of recovery is to remove the Atlantic salmon from the endangered species list.

Patrick Keliher, Acting Commissioner for DMR says, "The high number of returning Atlantic salmon is encouraging. We have not seen this many returns to the Veazie Trap since the mid 1980s. Returns are also up for many of the Atlantic salmon rivers on the East Coast. The increasing number of returns needs to be put into context. Yes, the number of returns has doubled in one year, but that is only a small part of the story. Hopefully we will see large number of returns for several years. The next step is to review our monitoring data to see what management actions, if any, have played a roll in the increased returns. Given that many locations are experiencing high returns, an increase in marine survival is most likely the driving factor. Understanding what may have changed to produce higher marine survival is something that will receive extensive consideration."

Patricia Kurkul, NMFS Northeast Regional Administrator adds, "Slight improvements in marine survival have resulted in more salmon arriving to feed in the Labrador Sea and Greenland and returning home to spawn. Increased returns have also been seen throughout Canada, which is another encouraging sign."

“Even though one year isn’t a trend, the high number of returning salmon is encouraging,” said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Acting Northeast Regional Director Wendi Weber. “If numbers continue to increase over the next four or five years, it would give us some indication those recovery efforts are working.”

Biologists will assess the data to determine what factors led to such high returns. Biologists believe that better marine survival is one factor in this year’s result, but further research needs to be done before any conclusions can be made.

The final totals for 2011 will be available later this fall, and are posted and updated weekly at <http://www.maine.gov/dmr/searunfish/salmontraps.shtml>.

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